LADY ATHLYNE

(Continued.)

That evening before going to dress for dinner Joy went to the window and pulled aside the blind so that she stood outside it. The dusk was now thick; the day had gone, but the moon had not yet risen. It was impossible to see much; only the outline of the trees, and out on the grass the shadowy form of a man seated. There was one faint red spark of brightness, face high, such as might be the tip of a cigar.

When she came back into the room her father raised his face from the book:

"Why how pale you are little girl. I am afraid that long drive must have tired you. You were quite rosy when we arrived home. You had better sleep it out in the morning. If mother sees you pale she will blame me, you know. And Judy—well Judy will be Judy in her own way."

CHAPTER XII.

Echo of a Tragedy.

Athlyne had one other day almost similar to the last. This time he came to Ambleside a little earlier; fortunately so, for Joy had got up early. When he came into the square she was standing in the window looking out. Not in his direction; did a woman ever do such a stupid thing when at the first glance she had caught sight of the man far off. No, this time she appeared to be eagerly watching two tiny children toddling along the street hand in hand. He had time for a good look at her before she changed her position. This was only when the children had disappeared—and he had gained the shelter of the lilacs.

Love is a blindness—in certain ways. It never once occurred to Athlyne that Joy might have seen him, might have even known of his being at Ambleside or in its neighborhood. And independent onlooker or any one not bound by the simplicity and unquestioning faith of ardent love would at least have doubted whether there was not some possible intention in Joy's movements. His faith however saved him from pain, that one pain from which true love can suffer however baseless it may be—doubt. Early morning took him to Ambleside; he only went back to Bowness when those windows of the hotel which he knew were darkened for the night. The second day of waiting and watching was just like the first, with only the addition that the hearts of both the young people were more clamant, each to each; and that the rising passion of each was harder to control. The same routine of going out and returning was observed by the Ogilvies, and each of the lovers had tumultuous moments when the other was within view. More than once Athlyne was tempted to put his letter in the post or to leave it at the hotel; but each time Joy's chance phrase: "If I ever fall in love" came back to him as a grim warning. He knew that if he once declared himself to Colonel Ogilvie the whole truth must come out, and then his title and fortune might be extraneous inducements to the girl. Whenever he came to this point in his reasoning he thrust the letter deeper into his pocket and his lips shut tight. He would win Joy on his mere manhood and his manhood's love—if at all!

By the post next morning Colonel Ogilvie and Joy both got letters from Italy. That of the former was from his wife who announced that they were just starting for London where they wished to remain for a few days in order to do some shopping. When this was done she would wire him and he could run up to London and bring them down with him. This pleased him, for he was certain that by then he would have his automobile. He felt in a way that his pride was at stake on this point. He had told his women folk that the car would be ready; and he wished to justify. He wired off at once to the agents, in even a sterner spirit than usual, as to the cause of delay. For excuses had come in a most exasperating way. Long after it had been reported that the car had started and had even proceeded a considerable distance on the way he was told that there had been an error and that by some strange mistake the progress made by a car long previously ordered by another customer had been reported; but that Colonel Ogilvie's esteemed order was well in hand and that delivery of the car was daily—hourly—expected; and that once on its receipt by the writer it would be forwarded to Ambleside either with a trusty chauffeur or by train as the purchaser might wish. Colonel Ogilvie fumed but was powerless. He wanted the car and at once; so it was useless for him to cancel the contract. He could only wait and hope; and console himself with such attenuated expressions of disapproval as were permissible in the ethics of the telegraph system.

Joy's letter from Judy. It was in her usual bright style and full of affection, sympathy and understanding, as was customary in her letters to her niece. Judy had of late been much disturbed in her mind about the future, and as she feared Joy might be taking to heart the same matters as she did and in the same way, she tried to help the other. She knew from Colonel Ogilvie's letters to his wife which they talked over together that he was seriously hurt and pained by the neglect of Mr. Hardy. Indeed in his last letter he had declared that in spite of the high opinion he had formed of him from his brave and ready action he never wished to see his face again. To Judy this meant much, the most that could be of possible ill; Joy's happiness might be at stake. The aunt, steeped through and through with knowledge of the world and character—a knowledge gained from her own heart, its hopes and pains and from bitter experience of the woes of others—knew that her niece would suffer deeply in case of any rupture between her father and the man who had saved her life. It was not merely from imaginative sympathy that she derived her belief. She had had many and favourable opportunities of studying Joy closely, and she had in her own mind no doubt whatever that the girl's affections were given beyond recall to the handsome stranger. So in her letter she tried to guard her from the pain of present imaginings and yet to prepare her subtly for the possibility of disappointment in the future. Her letter in its important parts ran:

"Your father is undoubtedly very angry with Mr. Hardy; and though I believe that his anger may have a slight basis it is altogether excessive. We do not know yet what Mr. Hardy's limitations of freedom may be. After all, darling, we do not know anything as yet of his circumstances or his surroundings. He may have a thousand calls on his time which we neither know nor understand. For all we can tell he may have a wife already—though this I do not believe or accept for a moment. And you don't either my dear! Of course this is all a joke. We know he is free as to marriage, though I don't believe his heart is—Eh! Puss! But seriously if you ever get a chance tell him to try to be very nice to your father. Old men are often more sensitive in some things than young ones, more sensitive than even we women are supposed to be. So when he does come to see you both—for he will come soon (if he hasn't already come)—don't keep him all to yourself, but contrive somehow that your father can have a little chat with him. You needn't go altogether away you know, my dear. Don't sit so far away that he can't see you nor you him (this is a whisper expressed in writing) and I dare say you will like to hear all they say to each other. But if he says a word about seeing your daddy alone for a moment, if he begins to look ill at ease or to get red and then pale and red again, or stammers and clears his throat do you just get up quietly and go out of the room without a word in the most natural way in the world, just as if you were doing some little household duty. I suppose I needn't tell you this; you know it just as well as I do, though I have known it by experience and you can not. You know how I know it darling though I never told you this part of it. Women are Cowards. We know it though we don't always say so, and we even disguise it from others now and then. But in such a time as I have mentioned we are all Cowards We couldn't stay if we would. We want to get away and hide our heads just as we do when it thunders. But what an awful lot of rot I am talking. When Mr. Hardy and your father meet they will, I am sure, have plenty to talk about without either you or me being the subject of it. They are both sportsmen and fond of horses—and a lot of things. It is only if they don't meet that I am afraid of. I am writing by the way to Mr. Hardy this post to know where he is at present and where he has been. I shall of course write you when I hear; or if there be anything important I shall wire. We are off to London and it is possible that whilst we are there we may have unexpected meetings with all sorts of friends and calls from them. I hope, darling, that by the time we reach Ambleside we shall find you blooming, full of happiness and health and freshness, the very embodiment of your name."

The letter both disquieted Joy and soothed her. There were suggestions of fear, but there was also a consistent strain of hope. Judy would never have said such things if she did not believe them. Moreover she herself knew what Judy did not; her aunt hadn't peeped from behind window blinds at a tall figure behind lilac bushes or sitting in the darkness with only a fiery cigar tip to mark his presence. Poor Judy! The girl's sympathetic heart, made more sympathetic by her own burning love, ached when she thought of the older woman's lonely, barren life. She too had loved—and been loved; had hoped and feared, and waited. The very knowledge of how a woman would feel when the man was asking formally for parental sanction disclosed something of which the girl had never thought. She had always known Judy in such a motherly and elderly aspect that she had never realized the possibility of her having ever been in love; any more than she had given consideration to the love-making of her own mother. Now she was surprised to find that she too had been young, had loved, and had pleasures and heartpains of her own. This set her thinking. The process of thought was silent, but its conclusion found outward expression; the girl understood now. The secret of her life—the true secret was unveiled at last:

"Poor Aunt Judy. Oh, poor Aunt Judy!"

Athlyne's letter reached him a day later, having been sent on from London. It was a fairly bulky one, with a good many sheets of foreign post, written hastily in a large bold hand.

"My Dear Friend:

"I have been, and am much concerned about you. I gather from his letters that Colonel Ogilvie has been much disappointed at not having heard from you. And I want, if you will allow me to take the liberty, to speak to you seriously about it. You will give me this privilege I know—if only for the fact that I am an old maid; for the same Powers that made me an old maid have made me an old woman, and such is entitled, I take it to forebearance, if not to respect. You should—you really should be more considerate towards Colonel Ogilvie. He is an old man—much older than you perhaps think, for he bears himself as proudly as in his younger days. But the claim on you is not merely for his years; that claim must appeal to all. From you there is one more imperative still, one which is personal and paramount: he is under so very deep an obligation to you. A matter which from another would pass unconsidered as an act of thoughtfulness must now, when it is due to you, seem to him like a studied affront. I put it this way because I know you are a man of noble nature, and that generosity is to such even a stronger urge than duty—if such a thing be possible. In certain matters he is sensitive beyond belief. Even to a degree marked in a place where men still hold that their lives rest behind every word and deed, every thought or neglect towards another. I have some hesitation in mentioning this lest you should think I am summorning Fear to the side of Duty. But you are above such a misunderstanding, I am sure. Oh my dear friend do think of some of the rest of us. You have saved the life of our darling Joy—the one creature in whom all our loves are centred. Naturally we all want to see you again—to make much of you—to show you in our own poor way how deeply we hold you in our hearts. But if Colonel Ogilvie thinks himself insulted—that is how he regards any neglect however trivial—he acts on that belief, and there is no possible holding him back. He looks on it as a sacred duty to avenge affront. You must not blame him for it. In your peaceful English life you have I think no parallel to the ungovernable waves of passion that rage in the hearts of Kentuckians when they consider their honour is touched. Ah! we poor women know it who have to suffer in silence and wait and wait, and wait; and when the worst is made known to us, to seal up the founts of our grief and pretend that we too agree with the avenging of wrong. For it is our life to be silent in men's quarrels. We are not given a part—any part. We are not supposed to even look on. It is another world from ours and we have to accept it so. Please God may you never know what it is to be in or on the fringe of a Feud. Well I know its dread, its horror! My own life that years ago was as bright and promising as any young life can be; when the Love that has dawned on my girlhood rose and beat with noonday heat on my young-womanhood made it seem as if heaven had come down to earth. And then the one moment of misunderstanding—the quick accusation—the quicker retort—and my poor heart lying crushed between the bodies of two men whom I loved each in his proper way. . . Think of what I say, if only on account of what I have suffered.

"Forgive me! But my anxiety lest any such blight should come across a young life that I love far far beyond my own is heavier on me. I have lost myself in sad thoughts of a bitter past. . . Indeed you must take it that my earnestness in this matter is shown in the lurid light of that past. I have been silent on it always. Never since the black cloud burst over me have I said a word to a soul—not to my sister—nor to Joy whom I adore and whose questioning to me of my 'love affair'—as they still call it when they speak of it—is so sweet a tightening bond between us. I have only said to her: 'and then he died,' and my heart has seemed to stop beating. Be patient with me and don't blame me. You are a man and can be tolerant. Think not of me or any gloom of my life but only that makes me sadly, grimly, terribly in earnest when I see similar elements of tragedy drawing close to each other before my eyes. You may be inclined to laugh at me—though I know you will not—and to put down my thinking of possible great quarrels arising from such small causes as 'an old maid's' fears But when I have known the awful effect of a mere passing word, misunderstood to such disastrous result, no wonder that I have fears. It is due to that very cause that my fears are those of an old maid. I suppose I need not ask you to be sure to keep all this locked in your own breast. It is my secret; I have shared it with you because I deem such necessary for the happiness of—of others. I have kept it so close that not even those nearest and dearest to me have even suspected it. The rowdiness of spirit—as it seems to me—which other friends call fun and brightness and high spirits and other insulting terms—has been my domino as I have passed through the hollow hearted carnival of life. Judge then how earnest I am when I put it aside and raise my mask for you a stranger whom I have seen but twice; I who even then was but an accessory—a super on the little stage where we began to act our little—comedy or tragedy which is it to be?

"There! I have opened to you my memory, not my heart. That you have no use for. After such a letter as this I shall not pretend to go back to the Proprieties, the Convenances. If I am right in my surmise—you can guess what there is or why have you written to the old rowdy aunt instead . . . there is every reason why I should be frank. But remember that I hold—and have hitherto held—what I believe to be your secret as sacredly as I hope you will hold mine. And if I am right—and from my knowledge and insight won by past suffering I pray to God that I am—you have no time to lose to make matters right, and possibly to save the world one more sorrowful heart like my own. It is only a word that is wanted—a morning call—a visit of ceremony. Anything that will keep open the doors of friendship which you unlocked by your own bravery. We are going in a day or two to Ambleside. In the meantime we shall be in London at Brown's Hotel Albermarle Street where my sister, and incidently myself, shall be glad to see you.

"Won't you let me have a line as soon as you can after you get this. I am torn with anxiety till I know what you intend to do about visiting Colonel Ogilvie. Again forgive me,

Your true friend,

JUDY.

"P. S.—I should not dare to read this over, lest when I had I should not have courage to send it. Accept it then with all its faults and be tolerant of them—and of me."

Athlyne read the letter through without making a pause or even an internal comment. That is how a letter should be read; to follow the writer's mind, not one's own, and so take in the sequence of thoughts and the general atmosphere as well as the individual facts. As he read he felt deeply moved. There was in the letter that manifest sincerity which showed that it was straight from the heart. And heart speaks to heart, whatever may be the medium, if the purpose is sincere. It was a surprise to him to learn that Miss Judy's high and volatile spirits rested on so sad a base. His appreciation of her worthiness came in his unconscious resolution that when he and Joy were married Aunt Judy should be an honoured guest in the house, and that they would try to lighten, with what sympathy and kindness they could, the dark shadows of her life.

(To be Continued.)

'HANS' WAGNER ARRESTED FOR AUTO SPEEDING

(Special from United Press.)

Pittsburg, April 23.—Charged with speeding his automobile along Grant Boulevard 40 miles an hour, Hans Wagner, greatest of all ball players was served with summons yesterday to appear to-morrow before Magistrate Kirby for a hearing. Motor Cycle Policeman Bender who overhauled Wagner after a chase of ten miles, declared that the ball-player was "burning up the wind."